



# News Release

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## **More retailers selling tobacco to minors**

*State increases outreach to educate retailers about the law*

**OLYMPIA** — The number of Washington retailers illegally selling tobacco to minors has tripled since 2006, according to a new report. The annual rate of illegal sales was about 15 percent in 2008. That's up from nine percent in 2007 and five percent in 2006. The [state Department of Health](http://www.doh.wa.gov) ([www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)) is working with other state and local agencies to expand the effort to make sure retailers know what's expected of them — along with the penalties they face for violating the law.

“This is unacceptable. Our state laws are intended to keep this deadly product out of the hands of our young people,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “We’ve got to reverse this trend now. We know when tobacco is harder to get, kids are less likely to pick up this deadly habit.”

The state health department, local health agencies, and the state Liquor Control Board are increasing outreach to retailers through in-person education and training for all stores in the state that sell tobacco products. The Department of Health and the state [Department of Social and Health Services](#) have updated retailer education materials and created new, practical tools to address common barriers to compliance. The materials include pamphlets and posters in multiple languages, listing acceptable forms of identification and where to find age information. Online training for clerks is also being developed. It will show the correct way to read identification and how to refuse sales to underage customers.

Local health agencies and the Liquor Control Board will continue to conduct random checks of tobacco retailers to find stores that violate the law. Working with law enforcement, under-age customers try to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products. The state recently began using older teens, primarily 16 and 17-year-olds, for these compliance checks. That may account for some of the increase in illegal sales.

Clerks who sell tobacco to minors can be fined up to \$100; retail owners can be fined up to \$1,500 and have their license permanently revoked after multiple violations. A study conducted by Public Health — Seattle & King County found that stores with attached gas stations are most likely to sell tobacco to minors. Extra education will be directed at these retailers.

“Most retailers are taking the time to properly check identification and refuse sales to minors,” said John Taylor, acting director of the DSHS Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse.

“However, our community partners will be going store to store to make sure all retailers are aware of the law, the resources available to support compliance, and the consequences of violations.”

The national “Synar Report” shows the percentage of stores selling tobacco to minors. Until recently, the rate in our state had steadily declined. If it exceeds 20 percent, Washington could lose about \$13 million in federal funding for drug, alcohol, and tobacco prevention and treatment. Official youth checks determine the rate of illegal sales, yet anyone can report a violation on the [Liquor Control Board’s Web site](http://www.liq.wa.gov/enforcement/report_violation.aspx) (www.liq.wa.gov/enforcement/report\_violation.aspx).

Along with outreach to tobacco retailers, the Department of Health and its partners work to prevent youth tobacco use through support for youth anti-tobacco groups, educational programs in schools, grassroots efforts, and a multimedia advertising campaign and Web site, [NoStankYou.com](http://NoStankYou.com). Since the comprehensive state Tobacco Prevention and Control Program began in 2000, smoking rates have decreased among youth by about 50 percent overall and there are 65,000 fewer youth who smoke in the state.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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